

## Opening Statement

### **Chairman Mark Udall (D-CO) Subcommittee on Space and Aeronautics Committee on Science and Technology**

#### **Full Committee Hearing: *NASA's Fiscal Year 2009 Budget Request***

**February 13, 2008**

Good morning. I want to join my colleagues in welcoming Administrator Griffin to today's hearing.

This hearing marks the beginning of our consideration of NASA's fiscal year 2009 budget request, as well as providing us an opportunity to engage Dr. Griffin on a range of NASA-related issues.

Dr. Griffin, NASA has been in the news in both positive and not-so-positive ways over the last year. In particular, I would note that our Committee has had to ask the Government Accountability Office to analyze air safety data from the National Aviation Operations Monitoring Service (NAOMS) pilot survey because NASA had refused to do so. I am disappointed that we had to take that step, but rest assured that I intend to continue my oversight of this and other issues that need our subcommittee's attention.

Turning now to the FY 2009 budget request, it is clear that NASA faces significant challenges in carrying out the tasks that the nation has asked it to assume—and those challenges have been made all the more difficult by the inadequate NASA budgets that have been sent over to the Hill from the White House over the past several years. I had hoped that this budget request for NASA—which represents President Bush's last budget submission—would have reflected an intention by the Administration to finally address the impact of the previous shortfalls, yet in the main it does not.

The budget request has been described as a “stay-the-course” budget. Unfortunately, that is all too accurate a description.

Thus, this budget request continues the underfunding of the agency that became painfully apparent in 2004 when the White House announced a major human and robotic exploration initiative—including returning American astronauts to the Moon by 2020—while making a virtue of the fact that it was only adding a billion dollars in new money to NASA's budget over the first five years of the Moon-Mars initiative.

Since that time, it has sent over NASA budget requests that have consistently fallen short of what the Administration itself had said would be needed to enable NASA to carry out the exploration initiative and its other core missions. Now, despite the fact that there is a projected 5-year gap in the U.S.'s capability to get its astronauts into space after the Shuttle is retired - and despite the fact that the exploration initiative's Constellation program currently has reserves of less than 8 percent to cover any problems the development program might encounter over the next two years - the Administration has chosen not to request any additional funding for the Constellation program in this latest budget request, despite congressional encouragement from both sides of the aisle to do so.

That's not a great message to send to the NASA and contractor teams that are working so hard to implement the President's initiative. Nor does it send a good signal to the next President, whoever it might be, that the exploration initiative is a priority worth continuing.

What are the other ways in which this NASA budget request “stays the course”?

Well, it continues the practice of marginalizing NASA's aeronautics R&D program, in spite of congressional concern and direction to the contrary over the past several years. It is clear that the nation's aviation system is under severe stress, and NASA research will be needed if we are to move successfully to a next generation air traffic management system while protecting the environment and maintaining safety. The Administration's current approach to NASA's aeronautics enterprise simply is not going to get the job done.

In the Space Operations arena, “staying the course” unfortunately means continuing the practice of leaving unfunded and underfunded liens for the next Administration to deal with—whether it be the costs

of Shuttle transition and retirement, Deep Space Network replacement, or logistical support of the International Space Station. That is a troubling approach, given the already over-constrained nature of NASA's outyear budgetary plan.

There is one area, however, where "stay the course" was not followed—at least in part—and that is in NASA's science program. Thus, it appears that NASA did take steps in the FY 09 budget request to attempt to respond to concerns expressed by many in the science community and in Congress. Thus, the budget request contains new starts for high priority Earth Science missions recommended by the National Academies in its recent Decadal Survey, something I strongly support.

In addition, funding is allocated to augment NASA's Research and Analysis activities and to revitalize the suborbital research program—actions that will help train the next generation of space scientists and engineers. In addition, NASA has announced that it intends to undertake an ambitious series of new missions, including JDEM, a Solar Probe, an exoplanet detection mission, a Mars Sample Return mission, a major Outer Planets mission, as well as a significant increase in its lunar science initiative. It sounds exciting and promising. However, the reality is that no new money is being requested for NASA's science account to carry out all these new initiatives beyond what had previously been assumed—money is simply being transferred between science accounts. That's sounds a lot like the approach the Administration used to pay for the Exploration initiative and human space flight programs—and we see how well that has worked.

In addition, the bulk of the funding requirements for these new initiatives occurs beyond this budget's planning horizon—in short, finding the necessary money will be the task of the next President and future Congresses. I hope that we *will* be able to undertake at least some of the worthwhile new initiatives being proposed—I am a strong supporter of a robust and exciting science program. But we only have to recall the Administration's Project Prometheus and the JIMO mission to know that bold announcements don't always translate into real programs.

Well, I don't want to belabor the point: It is clear that NASA faces a number of important challenges. I intend to work hard this year to develop legislation to reauthorize NASA, and today's hearing will provide important input to that effort.

Thank you, and I yield back the balance of my time.